



The Cleveland Browns head to Cincinnati on Sunday to take on the Bengals. More importantly, the game presents the Browns with the opportunity to truly enter the playoff picture in the AFC.

A win puts the Browns just a half-game behind the Bengals and gives Cleveland a season sweep of Cincinnati, an important tie-breaker in what may be a tight race for the AFC North division title.

The Browns come into the game off a big home win against Baltimore, while the Bengals have lost consecutive overtime games on the road.

Can the Browns win in Cincinnati for the first time since 2008 and sweep the Bengals for the first time since 2002?

Well, that's the question, isn't it?

The Opposition

Cincinnati's record: 6-4

Offensive rank: 8th overall/7th passing/18th rushing

Defensive rank: 4th overall/7th passing/9th rushing

All-time record: Cincinnati leads, 43-37, and has won eight of the last 10 meetings

Last meeting: Cleveland won, 17-6, in Week 4

[Injury report](#)

The line: Browns +5.5

What to Watch For

The Browns showed in their last game against Cincinnati that they know how to beat the Bengals, now they just need to transfer that on the road.

The defense is going to have to lead the way again, starting with slowing down wide receiver A.J. Green, who comes into the day on a streak of five consecutive 100-yard receiving days and leads the NFL in receiving yards.

In their first meeting, the Browns limited Green to just 51 yards on seven catches, with Joe Haden doing most of the damage. The Bengals targeted Green 10 times with Haden in coverage, and Haden limited Green to just five catches and 41 yards ([according to Pro Football Focus](#)).

If Haden can have another big day like that it will go a long way toward helping the cause.

As valuable as Green is the Bengals offense – the more you watch Cincinnati, the more you realize that Andy Dalton is an extremely average quarterback without Green – they can't lose sight of tight end Jermaine Gresham.

Over the years the Browns have consistently had trouble covering tight ends and Gresham is no different. You only have to look back to the game against Detroit, where the Browns did a great job on Calvin Johnson (three catches for 25 yards, his worst performance of the season), only to see tight end Joseph Fauria burn them for three touchdown receptions.

Helping matters is the fact that the Cincinnati running game isn't very good, ranking 18th overall and 22nd with 3.8 yards per carry (just a tick better than the Browns).

In the first meeting, the Browns held Giovani Bernard and BenJarvus Green-Ellis to a combined 50 yards on the ground, and with a rush defense that is fourth in the NFL in allowing just 3.6 yards per carry, the Browns have an opportunity to make it a long day for the Cincinnati offense.

Of course, the same can be said of the Cleveland offense, which is going up against a Bengal defense that is currently fourth overall in the NFL.

As always, the Browns will only go as far as quarterback Jason Campbell can take them.

Campbell has continued a streak, started by Brian Hoyer, of going 13 consecutive quarters without turning the ball over. Campbell needs to keep that streak going for the Browns to have a chance on Sunday.

We may as well get it out of the way up front: the Browns can't run the ball and there is no

reason to think that will change this week. That puts more pressure on Campbell to find Josh Gordon and Jordan Cameron to keep the offense moving.

Cameron had 10 receptions for 91 yards and a touchdown in the first game against Cincinnati, but he has become an afterthought to Campbell, who has only targeted Cameron seven times (a stat that has somehow escaped the criticism of the Twitter crowd).

The one thing that may actually work in the Browns favor on Sunday is the weather forecast, which calls for an 80 percent chance of heavy rain and wind gusts of up to 30 mph.

Since the Browns can't run the ball no matter what the weather is like, rain and wind won't impact the running game. It should impact the passing game, especially on longer throws, which could hurt the Bengals more than the Browns.

As Pro Football Focus points out, just a bit more than 70 percent of Campbell's throws this year have targeted receivers less than 10 yards downfield, an area where the Bengals are potentially weak in coverage. An emphasis on shorter passes that are not impacted as much by weather sounds like a pretty good strategy.

The Prediction

Heading into the game against Baltimore, Browns coach Rob Chudzinski talked about how the Browns were tired of being the little sibling in the AFC North and the Browns responded with a win.

This week, Chudzinski talked about how the Browns have had a taste of some success. Come Sunday, the buffet is open and Bengal tiger meat is on the menu.

"Our players are excited about the opportunity and challenge this week with Cincinnati," [Chudzinski said this week](#)

. “We can feel the excitement that the fans and the community have. I’m pleased and have been pleased with the growth and improvement of this team. I like where we’re at and the direction that we’re going.”

If the Browns can beat the Bengals, it could give them the kind of boost that could carry the team through the rest of the season. Win on Sunday, and next week when the Browns come out of the tunnel for their home game against Pittsburgh the stadium will explode in a way that we haven’t seen in far too long.

A loss won’t exactly kill the season, but a win could change the direction in a profound way.

We’re probably going with our heart more than our head this week, but this Browns team has been full of surprises this season. They’ve already beaten the Bengals once this year; it shouldn’t be too much to ask them to do it again.

We’ll take the Browns, and the points, in a close Cleveland victory.

(Photo courtesy of ClevelandBrowns.com)